

The Missouri River

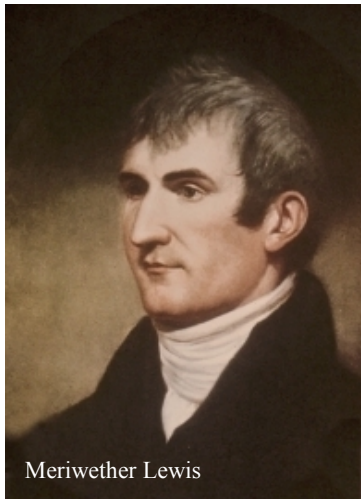


The Missouri River is one of America's most important natural resources. This mighty river runs for 2,300 miles from Three Forks, Montana, to St. Louis, where it joins the Mississippi River. These waters continue on for another 1,500 miles to the Gulf of Mexico, making the Missouri/Mississippi River complex the fourth longest river in the world and the third largest drainage basin.

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson organized an expedition to explore the American west as part of the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase. The "Corps of Discovery" was led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and started up the "Big Muddy" aboard a keelboat and two pirogues on May 14, 1804. Their goal was to explore the Missouri



William Clark



Meriwether Lewis

River from the confluence with the Mississippi in St. Louis to the western headwaters, thereby establishing an overland route to the Pacific Ocean.

The Lewis and Clark expedition documented the wildlife, native peoples and landscape of what would become the heart of America. In essence, the Corps of Discovery

conducted the first comprehensive scientific watershed survey of the Missouri River. Their journey opened the door to future development that would yield great changes in the American landscape.



Today, the “Big Muddy” is used by humans in many ways ranging from recreational activities such as fishing and boating to more commercial applications such as transportation, drinking water, crop irrigation and receiving waters for municipal and industrial effluents. Over thirty percent of the citizens of Missouri, representing more than 2 million residents, obtain their drinking water directly from the Missouri River.



Regretfully, the Missouri River also serves as a dumping ground for solid waste in the form of old tires, appliances, bottles, drums and other miscellaneous trash. Additionally, other less obvious forms of pollution such as sewage, detergents, fertilizers, pesticides, toxic chemicals and automotive oils, along with alterations in temperature and turbidity also impact the river.

Historically, access to clean water has been pivotal in the establishment of human societies. Today water is still a precious commodity that influences the success of modern communities. As part of the hydrologic cycle, water travels through the atmosphere and is redeposited on earth. However, no new water is being created, emphasizing the importance of how we use the water that is available. In the modern world we all live downstream of other water users.

